

# UNITED STATES SENATE

Washington, D.C.

**For Immediate Release**

March 18, 2009

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## SENATORS CALL FOR FIRING OF NASA WATCHDOG

*Bipartisan group asks the president to remove embattled IG at  
the space agency*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Today a bipartisan group of senators sent a letter to President Barack Obama calling for the removal of National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Inspector General Robert Cobb from his post, following years of complaints and investigations into Cobb's work as the government's watchdog at NASA.

U.S. Senators Claire McCaskill (D-MO), John D. (Jay) Rockefeller IV (D-WV), and Chuck Grassley (R-IA) cited as their reasons for the request Cobb's ineffective audit record, stalled investigations, whistleblower retaliation, and improper social relationships with the NASA officials whose work he was tasked with overseeing.

"The time is now for oversight that works," the senators wrote in their letter. "We respectfully ask that you take immediate action to put an end to conflict of interest and cronyism in the IG process by replacing Mr. Cobb and nominating a qualified candidate."

Tasked with performing oversight of an \$18 billion agency, Cobb's leadership has resulted in only \$9 million in monetary audit accomplishments in a five-year period, according to a [January 2009 report](#) from the Government Accountability Office (GAO). Under his tenure, he also has drastically cut the number of investigations and reviews performed by the Office of the Inspector General.

**Below is a copy of the senators' letter.**

March 18, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President  
The White House  
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing requesting the immediate removal of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA/Agency) Inspector General, Robert Cobb. Since his appointment in 2002, Mr. Cobb has been repeatedly accused of stifling investigations, retaliating against whistleblowers and prioritizing social relationships with top NASA officials over proper federal oversight.

A 2006 independent investigation found that Mr. Cobb not only created a hostile work environment and mistreated subordinates, but also compromised numerous investigations due to ties to agency leadership. Mr. Cobb's negligence further surfaced in a 2007 House Committee on Science and Technology investigation, which revealed efforts to shut down or ignore investigations on a malfunctioning self-destruct procedure during a space shuttle launch at the Kennedy Space Center and the theft of an estimated \$1.9 billion worth of data on rocket engines from NASA computers.

In his tenure, the number of investigations into waste, fraud and abuse decreased from 508 in 2002 to just 68 in 2007 according to a USA Today investigation. In a January 2009 report, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) calculated that the savings identified by his office was only \$0.36 for every dollar of his \$34 million budget. That return is 26 times less that of other Presidential-appointed IGs, which had a return of \$9.49 per budget dollar spent. Moreover, dozens of qualified auditors have left the Agency. According to GAO, the staff attrition rate rose from 12 to 20%. Recognizing these serious problems, House and Senate leadership have actively called for his removal.

Amazingly, Mr. Cobb is still there, yet the need for strong IG leadership is more pressing than ever. As you are well aware, NASA's 2009 appropriation is over \$17 billion, and the Agency received an additional \$1 billion in research funding in the economic recovery bill. NASA implements multibillion dollar, often decades-long projects and relies a great deal on contractors. Meanwhile, the Agency's contract management has been designated a high-risk area by GAO. The time is now for oversight that works.

We respectfully ask that you take immediate action to put an end to conflict of interest and cronyism in the IG process by replacing Mr. Cobb and nominating a qualified candidate. If we are to strengthen our oversight system, we must set the tone at the top and hold inspectors general accountable for improper conduct and just plain not doing their jobs.

Sincerely,

CLAIRE MCCASKILL  
United States Senate

JAY ROCKEFELLER  
United States Senate

CHARLES GRASSLEY

United States Senate

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